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UN Panel Re-Examines Himalayan Glacier Thaw Report

Hundreds of millions of people in India, Pakistan and China would be affected. Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh questioned the findings of the 2007 report.

"They are indeed receding and the rate is a cause for great concern, Jairam Ramesh said of the glaciers, but he told reporters the 2035 forecast was "not based on an iota of scientific evidence."

Other experts have said the 2035 projection was not based on peer-reviewed science. In London, The Times newspaper said the Indian scientist who first made the Himalayan thaw projection in 1999 now acknowledged it was "speculation."

Flaws in IPCC reports can be damaging since the findings are a guide for government policy. The IPCC's core finding in 2007 was that it was more than 90 percent sure that mankind is the main cause of global warming, mainly by using fossil fuels.

The minister also said that he had been accused of "voodoo science" in questioning the IPCC findings about the Himalayas in the past.

The IPCC's 2007 report said: "Glaciers in the Himalayas are receding faster than in any other part of the world and, if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 and perhaps sooner is very high if the Earth keeps warming at the current rate."

However, the report also said of the glaciers: "Its total area will likely shrink from the present 500,000 to 100,000 sq km (193,000 to 38,600 sq miles) by the year 2035."

At the Copenhagen climate summit last month, Pachauri, an Indian researcher, strongly defended the IPCC's core findings after a scandal over emails hacked from the University of East Anglia in England.

In the email scandal, climate change skeptics accused researchers of colluding to suppress others' data.

Ramesh had said in November that a paper commissioned by the Indian government had found no conclusive evidence to link the retreat of Himalayan glaciers to climate change.

He said many of India's 9,500 Himalayan glaciers are shrinking, but some are shrinking at a slower rate or even increasing.

Himalayan environment conference in Shimla

(Indian Express Chandigarh 21/3/2010)

Hundreds of environmentalists and conservationists came together to discuss the challenges faced by the Himalayas. Over 200 delegates from India, Nepal and Malaysia participated in a three-day conference.

Jointly organised by the Institute of Integrated Himalayan Studies and Himalayan Mountain Forum, the meet is a follow-up of the Himalayan Chief Ministers conclave which was hosted at Shimla in October last year.

Vandana Shiva, an expert on environmental issues urged the Himalayan nations to come together and conserve the Himalayas. She also said that the academic research conducted in the universities along with the knowledge of the Himalayan communities should be integrated to save the mighty Himalayas.

“Many, many reasons why the Himalayan regions need to come together. Firstly, the Himalayas is not a broken system. It is not that the Himalayas stops and Himachal stops. It carries on to Uttarakhand, it carries on to Jammu and Kashmir, so we need to see it in its integrity and we need to defend that integrity. But the other part of it is the Himalayan communities having such a distinctive culture. They are the true environmentalists of our times,” she said.

“The Himalayan communities have been conservationist communities and it is time to integrate research that happens in universities with the knowledge of the people in the community,” she added.

13-year-old California boy plans to climb Mt. Everest

(By ANI April 11, 2010)

LONDON - He's just 13 but he is all geared up to climb the highest mountain in the world. Jordan Romero, from Big Bear, California, may soon break the record of the youngest person to scale Mount Everest.

Temba Tsheri of Nepal, who climbed the mountain at the age of 16, presently holds the record.

Now, Romero with his father Paul and mother Karen are packing for the expedition, along with three Sherpa guides.

“I just wanted to do something big, and this was something I wanted to do for myself. It was all about the experience and I just happen to be 13 at this time,” the Daily Express quoted Romero as saying.

He has previously climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa when he was 10 years old, but insists climbing 8,000 metres (26,240 feet) is a far bigger challenge.

He said: “This will be a big leap, but we have been training for the altitude.”

However, Romero does not intend to take any unnecessary risks and would turn around if faced with problems like bad weather.



S. Korean is 1st woman to reach 14 Himalayan peaks

A South Korean mountaineer made history in the Himalayas by becoming the first woman to scale the world's 14 highest mountains, beating a Spanish rival for the record.

Oh Eun-sun, 44, crawled on all fours for the final, steep stretch to the peak of Annapurna, her feat broadcast live in South Korea by KBS television. At the top, she pulled out a South Korean flag, waved, and then wept before throwing up her arms and shouting: "Victory!"

Annapurna, at 26,545 feet (8,091 meters) above sea level, was the last of the 14 Himalayan peaks above the 8,000-meter level she had wanted to conquer.

She narrowly beat Edurne Pasaban of Spain to the 14th peak. Pasaban also was seeking to become the first woman to scale all 14 peaks, and had only the 26,330-foot-high (8,027-meter-high) Mount Shisha Pangma left on her list.

Oh also tried to reach the peak of Annapurna last year but turned away just hundreds of meters from the summit because of bad weather. Snow and wind also stopped her from making the trek last weekend.

“I gave it up because of a sudden ominous feeling that something bad would happen to either me or my peers including the sherpas on my way back to base camp,” she told The Korea Times newspaper last month.

She said this trip would be different, and said she would be carrying a photograph of Ko Mi-young, a lifelong rival who fell to her death last year while descending from Nanga Parbat, the world’s ninth-highest peak in the Himalayas.

Harvana teacher sets her sights on Mount Everest

(Indian Express, Chennai, 25/3/2010)

For a person who had her first glimpse of a mountain in a poster when she was 18 years old, physical education teacher Mamata Sodah has come a long way. She is now all set to scale Mt. Everest, the highest peak in the world.

The expedition is being led by living legend of mountaineering, Apa Sherpa who will be aiming at his 20th summiting of the 8,848 m peak this climbing season. She has climbed peaks in Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal in India.

Apart from Mamta, three more Indians are expected to take part in the expedition that will also clean up the upper slopes of the mountain and bring down part of the garbage and human waste left behind by earlier climbers.

Arjun Vajpayee, 16, hoping to become the youngest Indian Everest Hero, Ashok Vardhan from New Delhi and Bhagyashree Sawant 18, from Maharashtra.

Sikkim eager to protect environ around the Himalayas

(Zeenews.com)



Gangtok: Sikkim government will always like to become a willing partner in the regional endeavour to protect the Himalayas, Chief Minister, Pawan Kumar Chamling has said.

Chamling made the commitment to noted environmentalist Sundarlal Bahuguna's call to the countries and states located in the Himalayas to evolve a policy to protect the mountain range

from the impact of global warming and climate change.

The state government has taken a series of measures to protect the environment since Sikkim Democratic Front came power in 1994, Chamling told Bahuguna in a meeting here yesterday.

There was a ban on grazing of cattle, free distribution of LPG cylinders in rural areas to dissuade the people from using woods and forest resources for fuel and constitution of a commission to study the glaciers were some of those measures, he said.

Everest to be EDMUND HILLARY's last resting place

(Sentinel, Guwahati 2/4/2010)



Mount Everest the world's highest peach whose name came to be inextricably associated with its first conqueror, Sir Edmund Hillary, will be the last resting place of the New Zealander in a grateful tribute by Nepal, the tiny country he made famous worldwide.

“After I die, let my ashes be scattered in the two places I love the most – the harbour in Auckland and Khumbu in the Everest region) that was Sir Edmund Hillary's last big wish. Nepal's Tourism minister said that The Eco Everest 2010 expedition will place his ashes on Mt Everest and will pray that his should rests in peace. The expedition will be led by another mountaineering legend Apa Sherpa, the man who has conquered the peak 19 times and is now eyeing his 20th ascent.

We at HET pay our homage to Sir Edmund Hillary who was founder trustee of this Trust

The highest longline rescue in history on Annapurna

(Courtesy: World News Explorers web)



On April 28th, 2010 the rescue team of Fishtail/Air Zermatt was asked to come to the Annapurna mountain where a Spanish expedition was in need. One climber was exhausted after summiting the 8091 meter peak. He said he was snowblind and could not move his hands or legs. It was not clear at what altitude he was located.

The rescue team at once started the mission from Kathmandu but could not reach base camp of Annapurna because of the bad weather. They went to Pokhara and spent the night there. The next morning at 6.00 hour in the morning the team started out again and flew to base camp without further problems.

After a short meeting with the Spanish expedition leader it became clear that the missing climber was at around 7500 meter altitude. He was not answering the radio anymore. One Sherpa started in the night from camp 4, to try to reach the climber in need. In camp 4 (at 6950 meter altitude) there were three other climbers of the Spanish team, said to have High Altitude Sickness and frostbites.

In a reconnaissance flight, carried out by pilots Sabin Basnyat and Dani Aufdenblatten and an expedition doctor, the team found that the climber was dead.

The three Spanish climbers in camp 4 were evacuated with a sling operation, one by one flown to base camp at 4000 meter. Because of the high altitude, pilot Dani Aufdenblatten removed the doors and chairs of the helicopter.

The Sherpa who went up in the night, came safe back in camp 4 but did not want to be rescued with the helicopter. He walked down by him self.

The goal of the Nepal Air Rescue Project is that the Swiss and Nepalese pilots and rescuers train together, so in the future the Nepalese team can carry out missions by themselves. Menno Boermans Air Zermatt Switzerland.

(Ed note: Spanish climber Tolo Calafat, 40, vanished on Annapurna about 500 meters above C4, following a difficult summit descent that left him immobilized. Tolo's Sherpa returned to the dying climber with supplies from camp 4 but was unable to locate him. The helicopter picked up MD climber Jorge Egocheaga in BC for a search. Following the mission, injured/ailing climbers Horia Colibasanu, Juanito Oiarzabal and Carlos Pauner were airlifted from C4 back to BC.)

From April 24 until June 2, 2010, a Fishtail Air helicopter in the Khumbu area is manned by a rescue pilot and mountain rescue specialist from Air Zermatt. A second helicopter, flying transport missions in the Dhaulagiri region, is also on call if needed. In case of an emergency, the team is able to initiate high-altitude rescue attempts up to 7000 meters within hours of receiving a call.

These professionals fly a so-called “human sling operation.” Upon arriving at a rescue scene, one specialist will hang from the helicopter on a longline, a rope that can be extended up to 200 meters. After building an anchor and unclipping from the longline, the specialist will examine the patient.

The rescuer maintains contact with the pilot by headset, directing the longline back to his position, then clips himself and the patient onto the line. Dangling the longline, the helicopter flies to a level area where a paramedic or doctor is waiting.

This kind of aerial maneuver originated in the Swiss Alps. In 1970, a mountain guide with Air Zermatt performed the first longline mountain rescue on north face of the Eiger. This mission forever changed mountain rescue operations.

Because of the absence of proper helicopters and skilled pilots in the Himalayas, local rescue missions generally do not use longlines. Instead, pilots must land or hover, a challenge for many high-altitude mountainside rescues. There have been only a handful of Himalayan longline rescue attempts, and most were performed by specialized teams from faraway locations.

In 2005, the Pakistan Army successfully plucked Slovenian alpinist Tomaz Humar off Nanga Parbat's Rupal Face by longline with help from a distance by Air Zermatt. No

rescuer was hanging on the longline to assist him. In his exhausted state, Humar forgot to unclip his ice screw, which nearly caused the helicopter to crash. The new program hopes to increase safety by ensuring that a longline rescue specialist is available at all times to support the pilot and patient(s).

After last year's failed attempts to rescue Spanish alpinist Oscar Perez on Latok in August and Tomaz Humar on Langtang Lirung in November, Air Zermatt discussed options for improving rescue systems and reaction times in the Himalayas. The team pilots one AS 350 B3 helicopter, also known as a Squirrel, which can perform longline rescues up to 7000 meters.

Research & Awareness

Himalayas lose 16% snow cover

(Pioneer 28/3/2010)

In a significant revelation, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has confirmed the glacial area in the Himalayan region has undergone an overall reduction from 5,866 sq km to 4,921 sq km since 1962 – a decrease of 16%. The data given in newly uploaded annual report on website of ISRO under Programme on Climate Change Research in Terrestrial Environment (PRACRITI) a programme on space based global climate change observation has been launched to develop mechanism to quantify the state of changing climate and model its impact on terrestrial ecosystem.

. The retreat of Himalayan glaciers and loss in the real extent were monitored in selected basin in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal and Sikkim.

According to the Annual Report of ISRO, the PRACRITI programme presently consists of studies related with modeling the impact of climate change on agriculture, Himalayan cryosphere and hydrology, snow and glacier studies as well as sensor system studies for monitoring greenhouses gases. The programme is interdisciplinary in nature and would involve collaboration of various agencies such as ICAR, CSIR, SASA, IITs etc.

Snowfall over Himalayas may spur drought in India

(Courtesy: zeenews.com)



Washington: Scientists have helped to explain why heavy snowfall over the Himalayas in winter and spring can lead to drought over India, especially in the early part of the summer monsoon.

As far back as the 1880s scientists have known that increased snow over the Himalayas can be linked with weaker summer monsoon rains over India. However, the mechanisms

explaining this link were never properly understood.

New research shows that greater snowfall reflects more sunlight and produces a cooling over the Himalayas.

This means a weakening of the monsoon winds that bring rain to India. The relationship is strongest in the absence of warm (El Nino) or cold (La Nina) conditions in the tropical Pacific, because these are normally the dominant control over Indian rains.

Andy Turner, lead study author, from the Walker Institute at the University of Reading says: "Our work shows how, in the absence of a strong influence from the tropical Pacific, snow conditions over the Himalayas and Tibetan Plateau could be used to help forecast seasonal monsoon rainfall for India, particularly over northern India during the onset month of June."

"The onset timing of the monsoon is very important for agriculture; a lack of rainfall early in the growing season can have a devastating impact on crops," Turner said.

Previous studies have also found links between snowfall over a much larger area of northern Eurasia but this study suggests that the Himalayan region has a stronger influence on Indian rainfall.

The monsoon rains over India and the rest of South and East Asia are relied on by more than a third of the world's population, says a University of Reading release.

This study shows in detail the mechanisms linking heavy snowfall over the Himalayas and Tibet in winter and spring with summer monsoon drought, particularly in the early part of the season (June).

These findings were published in *Climate Dynamics*

India might be sinking into Earth's mantle

(ANI –Feb., 2010)



Washington: A new study based on computer models has suggested that India is sinking into the Earth's mantle.

Scientists have been mystified by the fact that the Himalayan mountain range is still growing, despite the fact that the India tectonic plate has been slamming into the Eurasia plate from the past 50 million years.

According to a report in Discovery News, a new study, led by Fabio Capitanio of Monash University in Australia, based on computer models of the two plates shows that *the formation and continued growth of the world's highest mountain range makes the most sense if a dense piece of India is down in the mantle, dragging the rest of the continent down with it.*

That may not sound so weird, but continents are buoyant; they're supposed to float, not sink.

All the subduction that is heard about all over the world is dense ocean crust sinking underneath continents.

But the situation in the Himalayas is different.

It's as though two cars collided, and one started to sink into the pavement.

It's raining snow in Himalayas: The Tribune

Chandigarh: There could be some reason for environmentalists to cheer. This year has seen a significant increase in snowfall in the upper region of Western Himalayas, the primary source of river water for northern India, vis-à-vis the past few years. This translates to the prospect of longer winters and increased fresh water flow in spring.

“We have received 70 per cent more than the average snow normally expected in November,” Ashwagosh Ganju, director of the DRDO's Snow and Avalanche Study Establishment (SASE), said. “Over the past few years, snow precipitation during this period was about just about 40 per cent of the normal,” he added.

More precipitation in early winters means that snow cover would remain for a longer duration and melt-off is less due to decreasing temperatures. Consequently, larger snow cover reflects greater amount of solar radiation back into the atmosphere, thereby preventing the earth's surface from heating up. The gaps between snow spells, however, should not be too long if the snow cover is to remain high.

Information compiled by government agencies, the average depth of snow cover over the Himalayas in Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh over 3000 metres was about 30 cm at the beginning of the month. The depth, though, varies from place to place and at certain points is over a metre deep.

Studies and observations have revealed that with the impact of global warming, there have been climatic changes recently in lower Himalayan regions at altitudes ranging from 1500-

2000 metres, resulting in lower precipitation.

“Winters at lower altitudes have started shrinking, with severe winters being reduced from about four-and-a-half month to about two months,” the director said. “At higher altitudes there has not been any significant impact on snow cover so far,” he added.

Talking about reports of Himalayan glaciers melting, Ashwagosha Ganju said there have been varied views on the subject. Observations have shown that there is no visible change in the state of glaciers at high altitudes.

There have also been reports that the strategically vital Siachen Glacier, the world’s highest battlefield, is also receding. According to SASE director, there has been some melt-off in the snout of the glacier and some other pockets, but the glacier as such is intact.

Robbing Himalayas of its grandeur

(Pioneer Jan., 2010), (Dinesh Pant)

Could anything be more pristine, more awe inspiring and more magnificent than the mighty Himalayas. Though they come under one of the most hilly sensitive ecological zones in subcontinent, balance of the Himalayan region is jeopardizes by unplanned almost reckless development and exploitation of its natural resources.

The most visible indication of this fast paced destruction is melting glaciers droughts, earthquakes, floods and landslides.

People living in immediate plains are already suffering and more likely to do so in future. Himalayan climate, always considered salubrious is now polluted. Once mosquito free, the Himalayan valley is now seeing people affected by malaria and dengue.

Every year forests are systematically set on fire and crores of rupees change hands in name of fire fighting. Every year, this fire claims large tracts of forest-land. Pushed out of their natural habitat, animals venture into human habitation for food. Once the ember dies down, a move towards aforestation is mooted. Instead of planting bamboo, which stores water, eucalyptus that draws out water from all around leaving the ground is dry is planted. Uttarakhand has been blessed by sufficient water reserves but such mindless plantation is proving to be detrimental and is drastically reducing ground water levels.

The development paradigm adopted by the State is only adding to the problem. More than 220 water power projects are currently underway 14 on rivers of Utarakhand. Gigantic amounts of debris generated will go into the rivers ruining them beyond any redeemable limits.

So while India and the world has been in the throes of negotiating terms for climate changes accord at Copenhagen, the precious Himalayas are being plundered and gradually destroyed.

The writing on the wall is clear: Unless a meaningful initiative to save the Himalayan Environment is not taken on time, a terrible future awaits us all.

HISTORY

The Tribes and People of Himalayas

History tells us that the original inhabitants of the Himalayas were the Kinnars, Kilinds, and Kiratas. Our Hindu epics and Puranas give reference of their existence in the Himalayan regions. History also mentions the names of Khasas and the Darads. But today only three different ethnic groups form the Himalayan population. They are the Negroids, Mongoloids and the Aryans. The population, settlement in the Himalayan region is greatly influenced by the topography, economic pattern and the climatic condition. The climate condition is one of the main factors for the population settlements since extreme climatic condition imposes a restriction on the living conditions and tends to restrict movement and communication. But the ethnic groups living in remote valleys of the Himalayan region have generally conserved their traditional cultural identities. But improvements in communication and transportation system have improved the lifestyle of the people living in those regions. The modernization is affecting the traditional cultural and social system of the areas. The population in the Himalayan region is nearly about 40 million. The Hindus of the Indian origin mainly dominate the Sub Himalayan and the Middle Himalayan valleys. In places like eastern Kashmir to Nepal it is mostly Hindu population. While in the Great Himalayan region in the north it is mainly the Tibetan Buddhists who are seen from Ladakh to northeast India. In central Nepal, both Indian and Tibetan cultures have blend together, producing a mixed culture of Indian and Tibetan traits. While in the eastern Himalayas in India and nearby areas of eastern Bhutan people practice religion and culture similar to those living in northern Myanmar and Yunnan province in China. Muslims are mostly seen in western Kashmir and their culture is similar to the population of Iran and Afghanistan. The people of Sikkim mainly belong to three ethnic groups. They are the Nepalis, the Bhutiyas and the Lepchas. The Lepchas are now a minority class but they are the original inhabitants. The main occupation of the people in the Himalayan region is agriculture and animal husbandry. But recently trade and commerce had played a vital role in the lives of the people living in the frontier villages in Himachal, Ladakh, Kumaon and Garhwal.